



Tropical Fruit No Match for the Lure of Las Vegas

Native Aruban Aron Kock found inspiration to come to the UNLV Center for Gaming Innovation in a pile of mango leaves.

Born and raised in Aruba, UNLV graduate Aron Kock spent many summer days in his teenage years cleaning the mango leaves out of his family's Caribbean backyard. While raking the leaves on one particularly hot summer day, Aron recalls discussing the card game Caribbean Stud Poker — created in Aruba — with his mom to distract himself from one of his most mundane chores.

Since 18 is the legal gambling age in Aruba, Kock had a few years of experience playing Texas Hold 'em online and in casinos and had developed a love of the game. In that moment, a young Aron realized that casino game design was the future career for him — and he swore he would never rake another mango leaf again.

Once Kock was old enough to attend college, he moved away from the island life to study gaming in the big city — at UNLV. The gaming management major signed up for a gaming innovation class launched by UNLV International Gaming Institute.

"I was so excited. I was probably the first person to sign up," Kock said.

Kock studied the history, math, psychology, and design behind some of the industry's most successful offerings, in a class co-instructed by former ShuffleMaster CEO Mark Yoseloff and Dan Sahl. Mentored by Yoseloff and Sahl, Kock invented a side bet that put a new twist on the traditional game of blackjack.

Kock's game, Flip Card Blackjack, is the first card game to use one of the dealer's cards as a multiplier. If a player is dealt a natural blackjack, they will net an additional payout based on the value of the dealer's first card.

The bonus bet is graded on the value of that first card, multiplied by two. For example, if a player wagered \$5 on the side bet and was dealt a natural, and the dealer had a 10 in the hole the player would earn \$100 — the dealer's 10 multiplied by two, multiplied by the \$5 bet.

Kock's game drew attention from local and national outlets like *CBS This Morning*, Las Vegas Sun, Global Gaming Business, and Las Vegas Weekly. Kock sold the game to Big Bet Gaming, which in turn sold it to Galaxy Gaming — one of the leading designers, developers, and manufacturers in the gaming industry.

Kock's success at UNLV allowed him to mentor other students, working with new students in the UNLV Center for Gaming Innovation to create commercially viable casino games.

After completing his master's degree in hospitality management, Kock used the connections he made through the institute to land a job as a quality assurance tester for GameCo—a startup company that develops skill-based gambling machines to appeal to a new generation of gamers.

"Aron has proved to be an invaluable member of the GameCo team, providing fresh new insights on the convergence of the video gaming and gambling industries," GameCo CEO Blaine Graboyes said.

It's been more than nine years since Kock left Aruba. Keeping true to his teenage promise, it's been more than nine years since he's had to rake a mango leaf.

TOPICS:

GAMING INNOVATION LAB , GAMING , HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM , STUDENT SUCCESS

ACADEMIC UNITS:

WILLIAM F. HARRAH COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY

CENTERS/INSTITUTES:

CENTER FOR GAMING INNOVATION , INTERNATIONAL GAMING INSTITUTE